

Movement Methods: Getting Started

If you are ready to kick start your health and fitness goals but aren't sure where to begin, you're in the right place. Adopting a fitness program is one of the best things you can do for overall health, both mind and body. However without the right approach, it can be easy to fall into bad habits. By establishing goals and setting realistic expectations, you will better your chances for having a consistent and enjoyable relationship with exercise. Follow these tips to help set yourself on the path to better health.

Evaluate your current fitness level: Even if you have a good idea of your current fitness level, it is wise to assess and record your baseline fitness measures for later comparison. A few measures to consider include: Heart rate (pulse) before and immediately after a 1-mile walk. Time that it takes to complete a 1-mile walk or 1.5 mile run. BMI (calculators can be found online). Number of sit-ups and pushups (regular or modified) completed in 1 minute. Sitting reach (measured by sitting on the floor with legs extended in front and reaching the hands forward as far as possible). This is also a good time to talk with your doctor and get clearance to adopt a fitness program, especially if you have health risks.

Outline your program: Don't just say, "I'll exercise all of the time!" and assume that you'll actually do it. Instead, formulate a plan that provides structure to your workout journey. Choose days and times that you will work out, what exercises you'll perform, and the intensity/frequency of the movements. As you map your program, it's important to keep some key points in mind: What are your goals? Where do you want to be in three, six, and twelve months as it relates to fitness? How much time each day can you commit to a workout? What exercises and activities do you enjoy? Consider what is important to you, then formulate your goals. Try to create SMART goals, which are: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, and Timely.

Gather your gear: Proper footwear and athletic attire will make you more comfortable and confident before getting started. For those working out at home, buy equipment that is practical and will fit in your space. If you are going to a gym, don't be shy about asking the staff for a tour of the facilities. They can also help clarify how to properly operate a machine. The 4:00p – 7:00p window tends to be the busiest at most gyms, which can lead to an intimidating or overwhelming environment. If you want to get going without the crowds, early morning, late evening, and weekends are typically the best times.

Start your program: But don't do too much at first. 20-30 minutes per session is a good starting point. It's okay to be excited, but overdoing a workout can lead to acute soreness or injury, which will only derail your progress. Listen to your body and stop if you feel pain, dizziness or shortness of breath. Begin with a five to ten minutes of light cardio to warm up, and finish with a cool down of similar duration.

Keep it fun! Pick activities that you enjoy. A run outdoors is just as useful as one on the treadmill, so allow flexibility. Try new sports, games, and activities, and get your friends/family involved for motivation. Permit yourself to take a day off or modify a workout if you're not feeling well. If you miss a workout, acknowledge that it's okay. Simply put it behind you and move on to the next day.

Track your Progress: Repeat your baseline assessment after 6-8 weeks. After an initial improvement, it's common to see diminishing 'gains' in fitness. The human body tends to react quickly in the first few weeks or months of training, but will often adapt to the exercise after this initial period. This may lead to plateaus in fitness, which can be discouraging. Increasing the duration, frequency, or intensity of your workout can help break through these plateaus and take your fitness to the next level.

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